

RADIO TV REPORTS, INC.

4701 WILLARD AVENUE, CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND 20815 (301) 656-4068

FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM All Things Considered

STATION WETA Radio
NPR Network

DATE September 15, 1984 5:00 P.M. CITY Washington, D.C.

SUBJECT Aid to the Contra: Senator Sasser

ALEX CHADWICK: Today's Washington Post reports the Central Intelligence Agency has supplied rocket-equipped airplanes to rebels fighting the government of Nicaragua. The Post says three twin-engine Cessna 02As, popular in many parts of the world for guerrilla-type warfare, were used in a recent attack on a Nicaraguan training site. If it's true the planes were given to the rebels, the act may violate a limit on aid set by Congress.

Senator James Sasser is on a subcommittee that follows military contracting. He's widely quoted in the Post article.

Senator, is the allegation true?

SENATOR JAMES SASSER: It's essentially correct. We have traced these 02 aircraft. Their point of origin was with a New York National Guard unit. They were transferred from there to the Air Force Logistical Command at Andrews Air Force Base. Then they were transferred to a Joint Chief of Staff project called Operation Elephant Herd, which is a secret project. It's a classified project. There, the paper trail ends on the three 02 aircraft. They turn up later on an airstrip in Honduras operated by the Contras. In between, before reaching Honduras and after the paper trail ends, they're found in Delaware undergoing a conversion at a private airfield to carry rockets. And from there, on into Honduras.

CHADWICK: And this is the work, according to you, of the CIA.

SENATOR SASSER: Apparently it is the CIA. We don't have clear evidence at this juncture.

OFFICES IN: WASHINGTON D.C. • NEW YORK • LOS ANGELES • CHICAGO • DETROIT • AND OTHER PRINCIPAL CITIES

Material supplied by Radio TV Reports, Inc. may be used for file and reference purposes only. It may not be reproduced, sold or publicly demonstrated or exhibited.

CHADWICK: Does this in some way, in your opinion, violate the \$24 million cap on aid to the Contras that Congress has voted?

SENATOR SASSER: Well, clearly, if these aircraft were transferred to the Contras free of charge, then this is in circumvention of federal law.

Now, the Congress put a \$24 million cap on aid to the Contras for fiscal year 1984. That cap has now been reached. And all of the funds that were supposed to have been transferred to the Contras or all equipment that would have been transferred to them and paid for has been done. And this could very well be an effort to circumvent that cap by transferring allegedly surplus military equipment from the Department of Defense to the Central Intelligence Agency, and the CIA then, of course, passing it on to the Contras free of charge.

CHADWICK: But how can you know, Senator? Why couldn't the Defense Department or the Central Intelligence Agency say, "Well, we did transfer these planes, but we bought them with a part of the \$24 million that you gave us to use in aid to the Contras"?

SENATOR SASSER: Well, we're going to find that out Monday. I'm going to meet with the appropriate Pentagon officials and ask them precisely those questions, whether or not this equipment was paid for. If not, has other equipment been transferred to the Contras without reimbursement to the Treasury of the United States? And if such equipment and supplies have been transferred, what was the date of transfer, what was the quantity of transfer, and what was the type of equipment that was transferred without payment to the U.S. Treasury?

There's no evidence at this point that these aircraft were paid for.

CHADWICK: Let me see if I can summarize what your contention is here. It is that the Defense Department, in order to circumvent this lid on aid to the Contras, is transferring useful military equipment to them, through the Central Intelligence Agency, at zero cost.

SENATOR SASSER: I think there's clear evidence here that military equipment may have been transferred free of charge to the Contras, in circumvention of federal law which has been on the books for a number of years, and also in contravention of the \$24 million spending limit, or cap, that the Congress put on military aid or financial assistance to the Contras. And if that is the case, then we have, I think, a serious violation of federal law and an effort here to circumvent the will of the Congress.